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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000524

SIPDIS

DRL FOR SHARON COOKE AND KAREN GILBRIDE

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [ASEC](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: GUINEAN PRISON CONDITIONS CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE

Classified By: A/DCM SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Sharing some insights into the deplorable conditions in Guinea's prisons and detention centers, the Director of the International Red Cross in Guinea claims that prison conditions continue to deteriorate. He blamed the situation on an overall lack of political will coupled with economic pressures. The Director highlighted cases of severe malnutrition, poor living conditions, and corruption. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) A/DCM met with Georg Cunz, the Director of International Red Cross/Red Crescent (IRC) in Guinea, on September 11. Preparing for an October departure and retirement, Cunz has been in Guinea for nearly three years. In order to protect IRC's access to Guinean prisons, Cunz has requested that his comments be kept confidential and non-attributable.

MALNUTRITION AND POOR QUALITY OF LIFE

¶3. (C) According to Cunz, prison conditions in Guinea are worse than they have ever been before. "There has been an absolute deterioration of the quality of life in detention centers," he said. He said that the National Director of Prisons, who has been in the position for several years, has no interest in addressing even basic problems. Cunz attributed the deteriorating conditions to lack of political will on the part of the national government coupled with increased economic pressures, including skyrocketing food prices. "Since detainees are seen as the lowest of citizens, they are the first to suffer when times are hard," Cunz told A/DCM.

¶4. (C) Citing a recent example, Cunz said that one of IRC's doctors had recently come back from visiting a small prison in Telimele, which is located in Upper Guinea. The doctor reported that ten of the prison's twelve inmates were on the verge of death, due to malnutrition, and were expected to die within a few days. Reportedly, the prisoners were not even able to stand up and move off their beds even when prison guards yelled at them to do so.

¶5. (C) In response to the crisis, Cunz said that IRC Guinea has expanded its prison nutrition programs, but even that initiative is not enough. "On the local level, money for prisoners' food is routinely stolen," he said. Cunz added that as soon as the IRC ceases a specific nutrition program, the prisoners revert back to severe malnutrition almost immediately. Cunz said he has been under pressure from his headquarters to issue a public statement, but he has argued back that such a statement would be pointless because of the government's absolute indifference.

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

16. (C) Commenting on the rampant corruption within the prison system, Cunz said that it is common knowledge that prisoners routinely buy their freedom. Based on information from recently freed detainees, Cunz said that the price for freedom typically ranges between 1 million (\$217) GnF to 10 million GnF (\$2173), depending on the severity of the crime. He estimated that this "fee" is then divided among various prison administrators, with the people at the top getting as much as 50%. Cunz said that the Director of Conakry's Central Prison is notoriously corrupt. Cunz added that the pay off system does not always work well for detainees. He said there is a Venezuelan currently down at the central prison on drug charges who has reportedly already paid millions for his freedom, but prison officials have refused to release him while continuing to extract bribes.

PRISON OPERATIONS BACK TO NORMAL

17. (C) When asked about the national prison mortality rate, Cunz said that such a figure was impossible even to estimate. He said that IRC's problem is that they may only visit a prison a few times a year, so they cannot keep track of who is there and who is disappearing. Cunz estimated the total prison population at about 2,300, which does not include military prisons. He noted that more than 80% of these prisoners have not been formally charged or tried.

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18. (C) Cunz said that prisons are operational again in most parts of the country, even though many of them were vandalized or destroyed during the period of civil unrest in early 2007. However, Cunz said that in many cases, the prisons are deplorable. IRC financed the complete renovation of ten prisons, but Cunz said they have refused to renovate an old prison building in N'Zerekore because it is too dangerous. "The conditions in N'Zerekore are really bad," he said; "people are kept in enclosed, dark spaces and have no access to fresh air or light."

COMMENT

19. (C) Guinea's Ministry of Justice, which is responsible for prison administration, has complained in the past of not even having enough resources to cover basic administrative costs such as salaries. The judicial system suffers from endemic corruption and the criminal courts rarely function. A handful of NGOs are working to improve prison conditions for a select few, but on the whole, human rights abuses are rampant. The Government of Guinea has not made any noticeable effort to address these problems. Embassy plans to highlight detention center conditions in an upcoming Human Rights Working Group, which is attended by a wide range of local and international NGOs, the diplomatic community, and the Guinean Government. END COMMENT.
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